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BRIEFINGS & STATEMENTS

PRESS BRIEFING BY PRESS SECRETARY KAROLINE LEAVITT

January 29, 2025

1:06 P.M. EST

MS. LEAVITT: Good afternoon, everybody.

Q Good afternoon.

MS. LEAVITT: How are we? Good to see all of you. It's an honor to be here with all of you. A lot of familiar faces in the room, a lot of new faces. And President Trump is back, and the golden age of America has most definitely begun.

The Senate has already confirmed five of President Trump's exceptional Cabinet nominees: Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete

Hegseth, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent. It is imperative that the Senate continues to confirm the remainder of the president's well-qualified nominees as quickly as possible.

As you have seen during the past week, President Trump is hard at work fulfilling the promises that he made to the American people on the campaign trail. Since taking the oath of office, President Trump has taken more than 300 executive actions; secured nearly \$1 trillion in U.S. investments; deported illegal alien rapists, gang members, and suspected terrorists from our homeland; and restored common sense to the federal government.

I want to take a moment to go through some of these extraordinary actions. On day one, President Trump declared a national emergency at our southern border to end the four-year-long invasion of illegal aliens under the previous administration. Additionally, President Trump signed an executive order to end catch and release and finish construction of his effective border wall. By using every lever of his federal power, President Trump has sent a loud and clear message to the entire world: America will no longer tolerate illegal immigration.

And this president expects that every nation on this planet will cooperate with the repatriation of their citizens, as proven by this weekend, when President Trump swiftly directed his team to issue harsh and effective sanctions and tariffs on the Colombian government upon hearing they were denied a U.S. military aircraft full of their own citizens who were deported by this administration. Within hours, the Colombian government agreed to all of President Trump's demands, proving America is once again respected on the world stage.

So, to foreign nationals who are thinking about trying to illegally enter the United States, think again. Under this president, you will be detained, and you will be deported.

Every day, Americans are safer because of the violent criminals that President Trump's administration is removing from our communities. On January 23rd, ICE New York arrested a Turkish national for entry without inspection who is a known or suspected terrorist. On January 23rd, ICE San Francisco arrested a citizen of Mexico unlawfully present in the United States who has been convicted of continuous sexual abuse of a child aged 14 years or younger. ICE Saint Paul has arrested a citizen of Honduras who was convicted of fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor. ICE Buffalo arrested a citizen of Ecuador who has been convicted of rape. ICE Boston arrested a citizen of the Dominican Republic who has a criminal conviction for second-degree murder. This criminal was convicted of murder for beating his pregnant wife to death in front of her five-year-old son.

And ICE Saint Paul also arrested a citizen of Mexico who was convicted of possessing pornographic material of a minor on a work computer. These are the heinous individuals that this administration is removing from American communities every single day. And to the brave state and local law enforcement officers, CBP, and ICE agents who are helping in the facilitation of this deportation operation, President Trump has your back and he is grateful for your hard work.

On the economic front, President Trump took immediate action to lower costs for families who are suffering from four long years of the Biden administration's destructive and inflationary policies. President Trump ordered the heads of all executive departments and agencies to help deliver emergency price relief to the American people, untangle our economy from Biden's regulatory constraints, and end the reckless war on American energy. President Trump also signed sweeping executive orders to end the weaponization of government and restore common sense to the federal bureaucracy. He directed all federal agencies to terminate illegal diversity, equity, and inclusion programs to help return America to a merit-based

society.

President Trump also signed an executive order declaring it is now the policy of the federal government that there are only two sexes: male and female. Sanity has been restored.

Before I take your questions, I would like to point out to — all of you once again have access to the most transparent and accessible president in American history. There has never been a president who communicates with the American people and the American press corps as openly and authentically as the 45th and now 47th president of the United States.

This past week, President Trump has held multiple news conferences, gaggled on Air Force One multiple times, and sat down for a two-part interview on Fox News, which aired last week. As Politico summed it up best, “Trump is everywhere again,” and that’s because President Trump has a great story to tell about the legendary American revival that is well underway. And in keeping with this revolutionary media approach that President Trump deployed during the campaign, the Trump White House will speak to all media outlets and personalities, not just the legacy media who are seated in this room, because apportioning — according to recent polling from Gallup, Americans’ trust in mass media has fallen to a record low. Millions of Americans, especially young people, have turned from traditional television outlets and newspapers to consume their news from podcasts, blogs, social media, and other independent outlets.

It’s essential to our team that we share President Trump’s message everywhere and adapt this White House to the new media landscape in 2025. To do this, I am excited to announce the following changes will be made to this historic James S. Brady Briefing Room, where Mr. Brady’s legacy will endure.

This White House believes strongly in the First Amendment, so it’s why our team will work diligently to restore the press passes of the 440 journalists whose passes were wrongly revoked by the previous administration.

We're also opening up this briefing room to new media voices who produce news-related content and whose outlet is not already represented by one of the seats in this room. We welcome independent journalists, podcasters, social media influencers, and content creators to apply for credentials to cover this White House. And you can apply now on our new website, WhiteHouse.gov/NewMedia.

Starting today, this seat in the front of the room, which is usually occupied by the press secretary staff, will be called the “new media” seat. My team will review the applications and give credentials to new media applicants who meet our criteria and pass United States Secret Service requirements to enter the White House complex.

So, in light of these announcements, our first questions for today's briefing will go to these new media members whose outlets, despite being some of the most viewed news websites in the country, have not been given seats in this room.

And before I turn to questions, I do have news directly from the president of the United States that was just shared with me in the Oval Office from President Trump directly — an update on the New Jersey drones: After research and study, the drones that were flying over New Jersey in large numbers were authorized to be flown by the FAA for research and various other reasons.

Many of these drones were also hobbyists — recreational and private individuals that enjoy flying drones. In meanti- — in the — in time, it got worse, due to curiosity. This was not the enemy. A — a statement from the president of the United States to start this briefing with some news. And with that, I will turn it over to questions, and we will begin with our new media members: Mike Allen from Axios, Matt Boyle from Breitbart.

Mike, why don't you go ahead.

Q Thank you very much. Karoline, does the president see anything fishy

about DeepSeek, either its origins or its cost? And could China's ability to make these models quicker, cheaper affect our thinking about expanding generation data centers, chip manufacturing?

MS. LEAVITT: Sure. The president was asked about DeepSeek last night on Air Force One when he gaggled for, I think, the third or fourth time throughout the weekend with members of the traveling press corps. The president said that he believes that this is a wake-up call to the American AI industry. The last administration sat on their hands and allowed China to rapidly develop this AI program.

And so, President Trump believes in restoring American AI dominance, and that's why he took very strong executive action this past week to sign executive orders to roll back some of the onerous regulations on the AI industry. And President Trump has also proudly appointed the first AI and crypto czar at this White House, David Sacks, whom I spoke with yesterday — very knowledgeable on this subject. And his team is here working every single day to ensure American AI dominance.

As for the national security implications, I spoke with NSC this morning. They are looking into what those may be, and when I have an update, I will share it with you, Mike.

Q And, Karoline, you say "restore" U.S. dominance. Is there fear that the U.S. either is falling or has fallen behind? And how would the president make sure the U.S. stays ahead?

MS. LEAVITT: No. The president is confident that we will restore American dominance in AI.

Matt.

Q Yeah. So, Karoline, first off, thank you to you and President Trump for actually giving voices to new media outlets that represent millions and millions of Americans. The thing I would add — the — I've got a two-part question for you. The first is just: Can you expand upon what steps the White House is going to take to bring more voices, not less — which is what our

founder, Andrew Breitbart, believed in — into this room, where they rightly belong?

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah, absolutely. And as I said in my opening statement, Matt, it is a priority of this White House to honor the First Amendment. And it is a fact that Americans are consuming their news media from various different platforms, especially young people. And as the youngest press secretary in history, thanks to President Trump, I take great pride in opening up this room to new media voices to share the president's message with as many Americans as possible.

In doing so, number one, we will ensure that outlets like yours — Axios and Breitbart, which are widely respected and viewed outlets — have an actual seat in this room every day. We also, again, encourage anybody in this country — whether you are a TikTok content creator, a blogger, a podcaster — if you are producing legitimate news content, no matter the medium, you will be allowed to apply for press credentials to this White House.

And as I said earlier, our new media website is WhiteHouse.gov/NewMedia, and so we encourage people to apply. Again, as long as you are creating news-related content of the day and you're a legitimate independent journalist, you're welcome to cover this White House.

Q And secondly, Karoline, you sa- — you laid out several of the actions that President Trump has taken. Obviously, it's a stark contrast to the previous administration and a breakneck speed from President Trump. Can we expect that pace to continue as the hun- — the — you know, the first 100 days moves along here and beyond that?

MS. LEAVITT: Absolutely. There is no doubt President Trump has always been the hardest working man in politics. I think that's been proven over the past week. This president has, again, signed more than 300 executive orders. He's taken historic action.

I gaggled aboard Air Force One to mark the first 100 days of this administration — 4:00 p.m. last Friday — first 100 hours, rather. And this

president did more in the first 100 hours than the previous president did in the first 100 days.

So, President Trump, I think you can all expect to — for him to continue to work at this breakneck speed. So, I hope you're all ready to work very hard. I know that we are.

Zeke Miller.

Q Thanks, Karoline. A question that we've asked your predecessors of both parties in this job. When you're up here in this briefing room speaking to the American public, do you view yourself and your role as speaking on — advocating on behalf of the president, or providing the unvarnished truth that is, you know, not to lie, not to obfuscate to the American people?

MS. LEAVITT: I commit to telling the truth from this podium every single day. I commit to speaking on behalf of the president of the United States. That is my job.

And I will say it's very easy to speak truth from this podium when you have a president who is implementing policies that are wildly popular with the American people, and that's exactly what this administration is doing. It's correcting the lies and the wrongs of the past four years, many of the lies that have been told to your faces in this very briefing room. I will not do that.

But since you brought up truth, Zeke, I would like to point out, while I vow to provide the truth from this podium, we ask that all of you in this room hold yourselves to that same standard. We know for a fact there have been lies that have been pushed by many legacy media outlets in this country about this president, about his family, and we will not accept that. We will call you out when we feel that your reporting is wrong or there is misinformation about this White House.

So, yes, I will hold myself to the truth, and I expect everyone in this room to do the same.

Q And, Karoline, just on a substantive question. Yesterday, the White House Office of Management and Budget directed an across-the-board freeze with

— with some exceptions for individual assistance. We understand just federal grants.

MS. LEAVITT: Right.

Q It's caused a lot of confusion around the country among Head Start providers, among providers — from services to homeless veterans, provid- — you know, Medicaid providers, states saying they're having trouble accessing the portal. Could you put — help us clear up some confusion —

MS. LEAVITT: Yes.

Q — give some certainty to folks? And then also, is that uncertainty — how does that uncertainty service the president's voters?

MS. LEAVITT: Well, I think there's only uncertainty in this room amongst the media. There's no uncertainty in this building.

So, let me provide the certainty and the clarity that all of you need. This is not a blanket pause on federal assistance in grant programs from the Trump administration. Individual assistance, that includes — I'm not naming everything that's included, but just to give you a few examples — Social Security benefits, Medicare benefits, food stamps, welfare benefits — assistance that is going directly to individuals will not be impacted by this pause.

And I want to make that very clear to any Americans who are watching at home who may be a little bit confused about some of the media reporting: This administration — if you are receiving individual assistance from the federal government, you will still continue to receive that.

However, it is the responsibility of this president and this administration to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. That is something that President Trump campaigned on. That's why he has launched DOGE, the Department of Government Efficiency, who is working alongside OMB. And that's why OMB sent out this memo last night, because the president signed an executive order directing OMB to do just this. And the reason for this is to ensure that every penny that is going out the door is not conflicting with the executive

orders and actions that this president has taken.

So, what does this pause mean? It means no more funding for illegal DEI programs. It means no more funding for the Green New Scam that has ta- — cost American taxpayers tens of billions of dollars. It means no more funding for transgenderism and wokeness across our federal bureaucracy and agencies. No more funding for Green New Deal social engineering policies. Again, people who are receiving individual asintan- — assistance, you will continue to receive that.

And President Trump is looking out for you by issuing this pause because he is being good steward of your taxpayer dollars.

Q Thanks, Karoline.

MS. LEAVITT: Sure.

Q How long is this pause going to last? And how is the Trump administration recommending that organizations that rely on federal funding make payroll, pay their rent in the meantime?

MS. LEAVITT: It is a temporary pause, and the Office of Management and Budget is reviewing the federal funding that has been going out the door, again, not for individual assistance, but for all of these other programs that I mentioned.

I also spoke with the incoming director of OMB this morning, and he told me to tell all of you that the line to his office is open for other federal government agencies across the board, and if they feel that programs are necessary and in line with the president's agenda, then the Office of Management and Budget will review those policies.

I think this is a very responsible measure. Again, the past four years, we've seen the Biden administration spend money like drunken sailors. It's a big reason we've had an inflation crisis in this country, and it's incumbent upon this administration to make sure, again, that every penny is being accounted for honestly.

Q Why impose this pause with so little notice? Why not give organizations

more time to plan for the fact that they are about to lose, in some cases, really crucial federal funding —

MS. LEAVITT: There was —

Q — at least for a — for a period of time?

MS. LEAVITT: There was notice. It was the executive order that the president signed.

There's also a freeze on hiring, as you know; a regulatory freeze; and there's also a freeze on foreign aid. And this is a — again, incredibly important to ensure that this administration is taking into consideration how hard the American people are working. And their tax dollars actually matter to this administration.

You know, just during this pause, DOGE and OMB have actually found that there was \$37 million that was about to go out the door to the World Health Organization, which is an organization, as you all know, that President Trump, with the swipe of his pen in that executive order, is — no longer wants the United States to be a part of. So, that wouldn't be in line with the president's agenda.

DOGE and OMB also found that there was about to be 50 million taxpayer dollars that went out the door to fund condoms in Gaza. That is a preposterous waste of taxpayer money.

So, that's what this pause is focused on: being good stewards of tax dollars.

Q And so, this doesn't affect —

MS. LEAVITT: Jennifer.

Q — Meals on Wheels or Head Start or disaster aid?

MS. LEAVITT: Again, it does not affect individual assistance that's going to Americans.

Q To follow up on Nancy, do you think there will be a list of who is affected and how much money is affected? How — how will these contractors and organizations know if they are actually being — having their funding frozen? And then, secondly, if you're willing, can you just clarify, is the end goal of this

to essentially challenge Congress or to — to prove that the president can withhold federal funding? Is — in other words, is this an attempt to pick a fight to prove that he can do this?

MS. LEAVITT: No, absolutely not. As it says right here in the memo, which I have — and I'd encourage all of you to read it — it says, "The American people elected President Trump to be the president of the United States and gave him a mandate to increase the impact of every federal dollar." "This memo requires federal agencies to identify and review all Federal financial assistance programs and supporting activities consistent with the president's policies and requirements."

The American people gave President Trump an overwhelming mandate on November 5th, and he's just trying to ensure that the tax money going out the door in this very bankrupt city actually aligns with the will and the priorities of the American people.

(Cross-talk.)

Brian Glenn.

Q Yes. Welcome.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you.

Q You look great. You're doing a great job.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you.

Q You talked about transparency. And some of us in this room know how just transparent President Trump has been the last five or six years; I think you'll do the same.

My question is, do you think this latest incident with the president of Colombia is indicative of the global, powerful respect they have for President Trump moving forward not only to engage in — in economic diplomacy with these countries but also world peace?

MS. LEAVITT: Absolutely. I'll echo the answer that the president gave on Air Force One last night when he was asked a very similar question by one of your colleagues in the media: This signifies peace through strength is back, and

this president will not tolerate illegal immigration into America's interior. And he expects every nation on this planet, again, to cooperate with the repatriation of their citizens who illegally entered into our country and broke America's laws. Won't be tolerated.

And as you saw, the Colombian government quickly folded and agreed to all of President Trump's demands. Flights are underway once again.

(Cross-talk.)

Diana.

Q Two questions on deportations, if I may. President Trump had said on the campaign trail that he would deport pro-Hamas students who are here on visas, and on his first day in office, he signed an executive order that said, quote, "The U.S. must ensure that admitted aliens and aliens otherwise already present in the U.S. do not bear hostile attitudes toward its citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles." So, should we take this executive order as Trump saying he would be open to de- — deporting those students who are here on visas, but, you know, hold pro-Hamas sympathies?

MS. LEAVITT: The president is open to deporting individuals who have broken our nation's immigration laws. So, if they are here illegally, then certainly he is open to deporting them, and that's what this administration is hard at work at doing.

We receive data from DHS and from ICE every single day. From what we hear on the ground, ICE agents are feeling incredibly empowered right now because they actually have a leader in this building who is supporting them in doing their jobs that they were hired to do, which is to detain, arrest, and deport illegal criminals who have invaded our nation's borders over the past four years. That's what the president is committed to seeing.

Q One more.

MS. LEAVITT: Peter.

Q Just following up on that, Karoline —

Q Karoline, if I could ask you very quickly, just following up on the question on immigration. First, President Trump, during the course of the campaign in 2024, said the following about illegal im- — immigration. He said, “They’re going back home where they belong, and we start with the criminals. There are many, many criminals.” NBC News has learned that ICE arrested 1,179 undocumented immigrants on Sunday, but nearly half of them — 566 of the migrants — appear to have no prior criminal record besides entering the country illegally.

MS. LEAVITT: (Laughs.)

Q Is the president still focused exclusiv- — which is a civil crime, not a — not a — it’s not criminal —

MS. LEAVITT: It’s a federal crime.

Q It’s a fed- — so, I’m asking though, he said he was going to focus on those violent offenders first. So, is violent offenders no longer the predicate for these people to be deported?

MS. LEAVITT: The president has said countless times on the campaign trail — I’ve been with him at the rallies; I know you’ve been there covering them too, Peter — that he is focused on launching the largest mass deportation operation in American history of illegal criminals.

And if you are an individual, a foreign national, who illegally enters the United States of America, you are, by definition, a criminal. And so, therefore —

Q So, to be clear, it’s not exclusively —

MS. LEAVITT: — you are subject deportation.

Q I apologize for interrupting. So, to be clear, it’s not — violent criminals do not receive precedence in terms of the deportations taking place?

MS. LEAVITT: The president has also said — two things can be true at the same time. We want to deport illegal criminals, illegal immigrants from this country. But the president has said that, of course, the illegal dr- — criminal drug dealers, the rapists, the murderers, the individuals who have committed

heinous acts on the interior of our country and who have terrorized law-abiding American citizens, absolutely, those should be the priority of ICE. But that doesn't mean that the other illegal criminals who entered our nation's borders are off the table.

Q Understood. Then let me ask you a separate question about the confusion that still exists across the country right now as it relates to the — the freeze — or the pause, as it's described. President Trump, of course, ran — one of the key policy items was that he was going to lower prices, lower the cost of everything from groceries, as he often said. But in many of the cases, it would seem that some of these moves could raise prices for real Americans on everything from low-income heating — that program; childcare programs. Will nothing that the president is doing here, in terms of the freeze in these programs, raise prices on ordinary Americans?

MS. LEAVITT: What particular actions are you referring to that would —

Q I'm referring to LHEAP right now. That's the low-income heating program, for example. We can talk about — there's no clarity, so I could refer to a lot of them. We don't know what they are specifically. Can you tell us that LHEAP — that LIHEAP is not one of those affected?

MS. LEAVITT: So, you're asking a hypoc- — -thetical based on programs that you can't even identify?

Q No, I just identified — I —

MS. LEAVITT: What I can tell you is that the —

Q Well, just to be — just to be clear, since you guys haven't identified, let's do it together, just for Americans at home. Medicaid, is that affected?

MS. LEAVITT: I gave you a list of examples — Social Security, Medicare, welfare benefits —

Q Medicaid too, correct?

MS. LEAVITT: — food stamps — that will not be impacted by this federal pause. I can get you the full list after this briefing from the Office of Management and Budget.

But I do want to address the cost cutting, because that's certainly very important, and — and cutting the cost of living in this country. President Trump has taken historic action over the past week to do that. He actually signed a memorandum to deliver emergency price relief for American families, which took a number of actions. I can walk you through those. He also repealed many onerous Biden administration regulations. We know, over the past four years, American households has been essentially taxed \$55,000 in regulations from the previous administration. President Trump, with the swipe of his pen, rescinded those, which will ultimately put more money back in the pockets of the American people. So, deregulation is a big deal.

And then, when it comes to energy, I mean, the president signed an executive order to declare a national energy emergency here at home, which is going to make America energy dominant. We know that energy is one of the number-one drivers of inflation, and so that's why the president wants to increase our energy supply: to bring down costs for Americans. The Trump energy boom is incoming, and Americans can expect that.

Q Please share that memo. Thank you.

MS. LEAVITT: I will.

(Cross-talk.)

Q Karoline, I think — some of the confusion, I think, may be here with this pause on federal funding. You've made it clear you're not stopping funds that go directly to individuals, but there certainly are lots of organizations that receive funding and then may pass along a benefit — Meals on Wheels, for one. They provide meals for over 2.2 million seniors.

What is the president's message to Americans out there, many of whom supported him and voted for him, who are concerned that this is going to impact them directly, even if, as you said, the funding isn't coming directly to their wallet?

MS. LEAVITT: I have now been asked and answered this question four times.

To individuals at home who receive direct assistance from the federal government, you will not be impacted by this federal freeze. In fact, OMB just sent out a memo to Capitol Hill with Q and A to — to clarify some of the questions and the answers that all of you are a- — are asking me right now. Again, direct assistance will not be impacted. I've been asked and answered about this OMB memo. There's many other topics of the day.

Jacqui Heinrich.

Q But on indirect assistance, Karoline —

Q Thank you, Karoline.

Q — if it's going to another organization and then trickling down?

MS. LEAVITT: Direct assistance that is in the hands of the American people will not be impacted.

Again, as I said to Peter, we will continue to provide that list as it comes to fruition. But OMB right now is focused on analyzing the federal government's spending, which is exactly what the American people elected President Trump to do.

(Cross-talk.)

Q Thank you, Karoline.

Q And one question on immigration, Karoline. On immigration.

Q Thank you, Karo- —

Q Of the 3,500 arrests ICE has made so far since President Trump came back into office, can you just tell us the numbers? How many have a criminal record versus those who are just in the country illegally.

MS. LEAVITT: All of them, because they illegally broke our nation's laws, and, therefore, they are criminals, as far as this administration goes. I know the last administration didn't see it that way, so it's a big culture shift in our nation to view someone who breaks our immigration laws as a criminal. But that's exactly what they are.

Jacqui.

(Cross-talk.)

Q Karoline, on tariffs.

Q But you made a point of going with the worst first.

Q On tariffs.

Q They all have a criminal record?

Q And welcome to the briefing room.

MS. LEAVITT: If they broke our nation's laws, yes, they are a criminal.

Yes.

Q Thank you. On stripping security details for figures like John Bolton, Pompeo, Brian Hook. Senator Tom Cotton said that he's seen the intelligence and the threat from Iran is real for anyone who played a role in the Soleimani strike. He voiced concern it wouldn't just impact those individuals but potentially their family, innocent bystanders, friends — anyone who is near them when they're out in public. Is the president open to reconsidering his decision?

MS. LEAVITT: The president was asked and answered this yesterday, and he was firm in his decision, despite some of the comments that you had referenced. And he's made it very clear that he does not believe American taxpayers should fund security details for individuals who have served in the government for the rest of their lives. And there's nothing stopping these individuals that you mentioned from obtaining private security.

That's where the president stands on it. I have no updates on that.

Q Is there any concern that this decision might jeopardize the administration's ability to hire the best advisers for these kinds of positions in the future?

MS. LEAVITT: No. In fact, I've talked to the Presidential Personnel Office who has told me directly that there is such an influx of resumes for this administration that it's incredibly overwhelming. There is no lack of talent for the Trump administration.

Reagan Ree- —

Q And would he — would he take any responsibility —

Q Thanks, Karoline.

Q – if anything happened to these people? Would he feel at all that his decision was a factor in that?

MS. LEAVITT: The president was asked and answered this yesterday. I'd defer you to his comments.

Q Thanks, Karoline.

Q Karoline –

MS. LEAVITT: Reagan, since you're in the back row, I hear y- – the back row hasn't gotten much attention in the last four years –

Q Yes, thank you.

MS. LEAVITT: – so I'm happy to answer your question.

Q And I can project. (Laughter.)

Does the president intend to permanently cut off funding to NGOs that are bringing illegal foreign nationals to the country, such as Catholic Charities?

MS. LEAVITT: I am actually quite certain that the president signed an executive order that did just that, and I can point you to that.

Q One more, Karoline.

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah.

Q President Trump issued an executive order on increased vetting for refugees in visa applications.

MS. LEAVITT: That's right.

Q Part of that order was considering an outright ban for countries that have deficient screening processes. Has the president considered yet which countries might fall into this category? Are countries like Afghanistan or Syria under consideration for a full ban?

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah. So, the president signed an executive order to streamline the vetting for visa applicants and for illegal immigrants in this country who are coming, of course, from other nations.

It also directed the secretary of State to review the process and make sure that other countries around the world are being completely transparent with

our nation and the individuals that they are sending here. And so, the secretary of State has been directed to report back to the president. I haven't seen that report yet. We've only been here for a few days.

(Cross-talk.)

Q Karoline, two questions for you. One on the freeze in federal funding. Who advised the president on the legality of telling government agencies that they don't have to spend money that was already appropriated by Congress?

MS. LEAVITT: Well, as the OMB memo states, this is certainly within the confines of the law.

So, White House Counsel's Office believes that this is within the pe- — president's power to do it, and therefore, he's doing it.

Q Okay. So, they disagree with lawmakers who say that they don't have the power to — to freeze this funding?

MS. LEAVITT: Again, I would point you to the language in the memo that clearly states this is within the law.

Q And on what happened on Friday night. The — the administration fired several inspectors general without giving Congress the 30-day legally required notification that they were being fired. I think only two were left at DO- — DHS and the DOJ. And then, yesterday, we saw several prosecutors — I believe 12 — fired from the Justice Department who worked on the investigations into the president. As you know, they are career prosecutors; therefore, they are afforded civil service protections. How is the administration deciding which laws to follow and which ones to ignore?

MS. LEAVITT: So, it is the belief of this White House and the White House Counsel's Office that the president was within his exe- — executive authority to do that. He is the executive of the executive branch, and, therefore, he has the power to fire anyone within the executive branch that he wishes to.

There's also a case that went before the Supreme Court in 2020: Seila [Seila] Law LLC, v. the Customs — the [Consumer Financial Protection] Bureau

Protection. I would advise you to look at that case, and that's the legality that this White House has rested on.

Q So, you're confident that if they bring lawsuits against you — those prosecutors who were fired — that — that they will succeed?

MS. LEAVITT: We will win in court, yes.

Q And did he personally direct this, given they worked on the classified documents investigation and the election interference investigation?

MS. LEAVITT: This was a memo that went out by the Presidential Personnel Office, and the president is the leader of this White House. So, yes.

Q So, it did come from him?

MS. LEAVITT: Yes, it came from this White House.

(Cross-talk.)

Q Karoline.

MS. LEAVITT: Sir.

Q Thank you. Congrats on your first day behind the podium.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you.

Q President Trump ended funding for UNRWA and also designated the Houthis a foreign terrorist organization.

MS. LEAVITT: That's right.

Q Both were decisions that the previous administration had reversed. So, here's my question: Will there be an investigation into who gave the previous administration this terrible advice?

MS. LEAVITT: Well, that's a very good point. I haven't heard discussions about such an ins- — investigation, but it wouldn't be a bad idea, considering that the Houthis cer- — certainly are terrorists. They have launched attacks on U.S. naval ships across this world, and so I think it was a very wise move by this administration to redesignate them as a terrorist group, because they are. And I think it was a foolish decision by the previous administration to do so.

As for an investigation, I'm not sure about that, but it's not a bad idea.

(Cross-talk.)

Josh.

Q Thank you for the question. I appreciate it. Can you give us an update on the president's plan for his tariff agenda? He spoke a lot about this yesterday, and there's a couple of dates coming up that —

MS. LEAVITT: Sure.

Q — he's spoken to. Number one, February 1st. He's alluded to both the potential for tariffs for Canada and Mexico but also China to take effect on those days. Where is — what's he thinking about that?

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah.

Q Should those countries expect that on the 1st?

MS. LEAVITT: Again, he was asked and answered this question this past weekend when he took a lot of questions from the press, and he said that the February 1st date for Canada and Mexico still holds.

Q And what about the China 10 percent tariff that he also had mused about last Tuesday going into effect on the same date?

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah, the president has said that he is very much still considering that for February 1st.

Q And then, separately, yesterday, he talked also about sectoral tariffs on, for instance, pharmaceuticals, as well as semiconductor computer chips. He talked about steel, aluminum, and copper. What's the timeline on those? Is that a similar sort of "coming days" thing or —

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah, so when the president talked about that in his speech yesterday, that actually wasn't a new announcement. That was within a presidential memorandum that he signed in one of the first days here in the White House on his America First trade agenda. So, there's more details on those tariffs in there.

As far as a date, I don't have a specific date to read out to you, but the president is committed to implementing tariffs effectively, just like he did in his first term.

Q And then — and then, finally, he also was asked on the plane when he gaggled about the potential for a universal tariff. He was asked maybe about two and a half percent.

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah.

Q There was a report about that. He said he wanted “much bigger than that.” Should we understand that these tariffs would add up? You know, in other words, you might have country-specific tariffs like Canada, Mexico, China. You might have sectoral tariffs, like on pharmaceuticals, as well as a potential universal tariff on top of that. Do these stack on one or the other, or would one sort of take precedence over another?

MS. LEAVITT: All I can point you to is what the president has said on this front: the February 1st date for Canada and Mexico and also the China tariff that he has discussed.

He rejected the 2.5 percent tariff. He said that was a little bit too low. He wants it to be higher.

I'll leave it to him to make any decisions on that front.

Q Do you have any comment on what the —
(Cross-talk.)

Q — what the Mexicans and Canadians —

MS. LEAVITT: Phil.

Q — have done so far? Do you have any comment on whether that has met the bar of what he wants to see on fentanyl? Thank you.

MS. LEAVITT: I — I won't get ahead of the president, again, on advocating to foreign nations on what they should or shouldn't do to get away from these tariffs. The president has made it very clear, again, that he expects every nation around this world to cooperate with the repatriation of their citizens. And the president has also put out specific statements in terms of Canada and Mexico when it comes to what he expects in terms of border security. We have seen a historic level of cooperation from Mexico. But, again, as far as I'm still tracking — and that was last night talking to the president directly —

February 1st is still on the books.

Q Thank you.

MS. LEAVITT: Phil.

Q Thank you, Karoline. Quick programming note, and then a question on taxes.

MS. LEAVITT: A programming note.

Q Well, in terms of programming, should —

MS. LEAVITT: That sounds fun.

Q — we expect to see you here every day? How frequently will these —

Q That's a good question.

Q — press briefings be?

MS. LEAVITT: It is a good question, April.

So, look, the president, as you know, is incredibly accessible. First day here, he wanted all of you in the Oval Office. You got a 60-minute press conference with the leader of the free world — while he was simultaneously signing executive orders, I may add. That's pretty impressive. I don't think the previous office holder would be able to pull such a thing off.

So, look, the president is the best spokesperson that this White House has, and I can assure you that you will be hearing from both him and me as much as possible.

Q And then a question about tax cuts. You know, the president has promised to extend the tax cuts from the previous term. I'm curious, you know, does the president support corresponding spending cuts, as some Republicans have called for in Congress? And will the new Treasury secretary be leading those negotiations with the Hill, as Mnuchin did during the first administration?

MS. LEAVITT: The president is committed to both tax cuts and spending cuts.

And he has a great team negotiating on his behalf, but there's no better negotiator than Donald Trump, and I'm sure he'll be involved in this

reconciliation process as it moves forward.

(Cross-talk.)

Q Karoline, in the announcement that you made last night on the Iron Dome, it said the president had directed that the United States will build this Iron Dome.

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah.

Q When you read into the executive order, it seemed short of that. It asked for a series of studies —

MS. LEAVITT: Yeah.

Q — and reports back on — can you tell us whether the president has directed this and, if he is this concerned on this issue, why the suspensions that we saw listed by OMB included so many different nuclear programs, nonproliferation programs, programs to blend down nuclear weapons, and s— and so forth?

MS. LEAVITT: First of all, when it comes to the Iron Dome, the executive order directed the implementation of the — of an Iron Dome. It also, as you said, kind of directed research and studies to see if — or — or how the United States can go about doing this, particularly the Department of Defense. When it comes to the other question that you asked about those specific programs, again, I would say, this is not a — a ban; this is a temporary pause and a freeze to ensure that all of the money going out from Washington, D.C., is in align with the president's agenda.

And as the Office of Management and Budget has updates on what will be kick-started, once again, I will provide those to you.

Q Can you clarify for a sec what you were saying before on Medicaid? It wasn't clear to me whether you were saying that no Medicaid would be cut off. Obviously, a lot of this goes to states before it goes to individuals and so forth. So, are you guaranteeing here that no individual now on Medicaid would see a cutoff because of the pause?

MS. LEAVITT: I'll check back on that and get back to you.

Jon.

Q Thanks a lot, Karoline. As you know, in the first week that the president was in office, signed an executive order as it relates to birthright citizenship — trying to eliminate that. Now, 22 state attorney generals have said that this is unconstitutional. A federal judge has just agreed with their argument. What's the administration's argument for doing away with birthright citizenship?

MS. LEAVITT: The folks that you mentioned have a right to have that legal opinion, but it is in disagreement with the legal opinion of this administration. This administration believes that birthright citizenship is unconstitutional, and that is why President Trump signed that executive order. Illegal immigrants who come to this country and have a child are not subject to the laws of this jurisdiction. That's the opinion of this administration.

We have already appealed the rul- — the lawsuit that was filed against this administration, and we are prepared to fight this all the way to the Supreme Court if we have to, because President Trump believes that this is a necessary step to secure our nation's borders and protect our homeland.

Monica.

Q And then on foreign policy — on foreign policy, Karoline —

Q Thank you, Karoline. It's great to see you, and you're doing a great —

Q — on foreign policy, if I may. The president's commitment to the NATO defense Alliance, is it as strong as the prior administration? Is it the same as when he served as president in his first term in office?

MS. LEAVITT: As long as NATO pays their fair share.

And President Trump has called on NATO Allies to increase their defense spending to 5 percent. You actually saw the head of NATO at Davos last week on Bloomberg Television saying that President Trump is right and if Europe wants to keep itself safe, they should increase their defense spending. I would just add that there was no greater ally to our European allies than President Trump in his first term. The world, for all nations in Europe, and, of

course, here at home was much safer because of Presidents Tru- — Trump's peace through strength diplomatic approach.

Monica.

Q Karoline —

Q Thank you. Thank you, Karoline. And it's great to finally be called on as well in the briefing room. I appreciate that.

MS. LEAVITT: You're welcome.

Q Of course, we know President Trump just got back from North Carolina and California meeting with victims of natural disasters. There's the two-year anniversary of the East Palestine, Ohio, toxic train derailment. Does the president have any plans to go visit the victims of that toxic spill or just visit in general?

MS. LEAVITT: Not — no plans that I can read out for you here. If that changes, I will certainly keep you posted.

What I can tell you is that President Trump still talks about his visit to East Palestine, Ohio. That was one of the turning points, I would say, in the previous election campaign, where Americans were reminded that President Trump is a man of the people. And he, as a candidate, visited that town that was just derailed by the train derailment — no pun intended — and he offered support and hope, just like I saw the president do this past week.

It was a purposeful decision by this president, on his first domestic trip, to go to North Carolina and to California to visit with Americans who were impacted by Hurricane Helene and also by the deadly fires — a red state and a blue state, both of which feel forgotten by the previous administration and the federal government. That has now — that has now ended under President Trump.

He will continue to put Americans first, whether they're in East Palestine, in Pacific Palisades, or in North Carolina.

(Cross-talk.)

Sure.

Q Thank you, Karoline. On California, could you please clarify what the military did with the water last night, as referenced in the president's Truth Social post?

MS. LEAVITT: The water has been turned back on in California, and this comes just days after President Trump visited Pacific Palisades and, as you all saw, applied tremendous pressure on state and local officials in Pacific Palisades, including Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, to turn on the water and to direct that water to places in the south and in the middle of the state that have been incredibly dry, which has led to the expansion — the rapid expansion of these fires.

Q So, could you clarify what the military's role was, where the water came from, and how it got there?

MS. LEAVITT: Again, the Army Corps of Engineers has been on the ground in California to respond to the devastation from these wildfires. And I would point out that just days after President Trump visited the devastation from these fires, the water was turned on. That is because of the pressure campaign he put on state and local officials there, who clearly lack all common sense.

And I will never forget being at that round table with the president last week and hearing the frustration in the voices of Pacific Palisades residents who feel as though their government has just gone insane. Before President Trump showed up on the scene, Karen Bass was telling private property owners that they would have to wait 18 months to access their private property.

So, this administration, the president and his team that's on the ground in California — Ric Grenell, who he has designated to oversee this great crisis — ha- — will continue to put pressure on Karen Bass and state and local officials to allow residents to access their properties.

This is a huge part of it. These residents want to take part in their own clearing out of their properties. They should be able to do that. It's the United

States of America. What happened to our freedom? Clearly, it's gone in California, but not anymore under President Trump.

Q Karoline —

MS. LEAVITT: April.

Q Karoline, welcome to the briefing room.

MS. LEAVITT: Thank you.

Q Several questions. One on the pause. Will minority-serving institutions, preferably colleges and universities, have those monies held back temporarily at this moment?

MS. LEAVITT: Again, I have not seen the entire list, because this memo was just sent out. So, I will provide you all with updates as we receive them. Okay?

Q Karoline —

Q And secondly — als- —

Q Karoline.

Q Also, secondly, when it comes to immigration, there is this southern border focus. What happens to those who have overstayed their visas? That is part of the broken immigration system. In 2023, there was a report by the Biden administration, the Homeland Security Department, that said overstays of visas were three times more than usual. Will there be a focus on the overstays for visas as well?

MS. LEAVITT: If an individual is overstaying their visa, they are therefore an illegal immigrant residing in this country, and they are subject to deportation.

Q And also, lastly —

MS. LEAVITT: Yes.

Q Lastly, as we're dealing with anti-DEI, anti-woke efforts, we understand this administration could — is thinking about celebrating Black History Month. Have you got any word on that? Anything that you can offer to us?

MS. LEAVITT: As far as I know, this White House certainly still intends to celebrate, and we will continue to celebrate American history and the

contributions that all Americans, regardless of race, religion, or creed, have made to our great country. And America is back.

Christian Datoc.

Q Thanks, Karoline. Just real quick. You mentioned the inflation executive order the president signed, but egg prices have skyrocketed since President Trump took office. So, what specifically is he doing to lower those costs for Americans?

MS. LEAVITT: Really glad you brought this up, because there is a lot of reporting out there that is putting the onus on this White House for the increased cost of eggs. I would like to point out to each and every one of you that, in 2024, when Joe Biden was in the Oval Office — or upstairs in the residence sleeping; I'm not so sure — egg prices increased 65 percent in this country. We also have seen the cost of everything, not just eggs — bacon, groceries, gasoline — have increased because of the inflationary policies of the last administration.

As far as the egg shortage, what's also contributing to that is that the Biden administration and the Department of Agriculture directed the mass killing of more than 100 million chickens, which has led to a lack of chicken supply in this country, therefore a lack of egg supply, which is leading to the shortage. So, I will leave you with this point. This is an example of why it's so incredibly important that the Senate moves swiftly to confirm all of President Trump's nominees, including his nominee for the United States Department of Agriculture, Brooke Rollins, who is already speaking with Kevin Hassett, who is leading the economic team here at the White House, on how we can address the egg shortage in this country.

As for costs, I laid out — costs — I laid out the plethora of ways that President Trump has addressed saving costs for the American people over the past week. He looks forward to continuing to do that —

Q Karoline, what —

MS. LEAVITT: — in the days ahead.

(Cross-talk.)

Thank you, guys, so much. I'll see you soon.

END

1:52 P.M. EST

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